

Westside Community Schools
Facilities Task Force Steering Committee Meeting
September 2, 2014 ~ 4:00-6:00pm

Mark Weichel, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching & Learning, reported on the recent survey that was conducted with community focus groups on the middle school configuration. Westside School officials surveyed and had conversations with all 6th and 7th grade students and 6th, 7th and 8th grade teachers. Almost all 6th grade teachers being surveyed felt that sixth grade students belonged in middle school. By a slight margin, more 6th grade students would prefer to stay in elementary school, however, the data also indicated that the 6th grade students, as a whole, did not fully grasp the concept of middle school. Data was still being compiled from the 7th and 8th grade teacher surveys.

Some of the considerations for making the decision regarding a move of 6th grade students to a middle school configuration include:

- Overcrowding
- Class sizes
- High expectations
- Implementation of a transition plan
- Need for community support
- Costs associated with maintaining a second middle school

Blane McCann, Superintendent, provided a summary of the recent school bond issue survey that was conducted by FM3 Research. Overall, the results were positive, with 56% (soft majority) of taxpayers supporting a \$190 million bond issue, and no significant change in that percentage with other large dollar amounts (\$125 or \$160 million). Support for a \$90 million bond issue jumped to 72%. A bond issue at this dollar amount would meet, at a minimum, identified infrastructure needs.

93% of those polled said that maintaining quality local schools helps to strengthen property valuations and 70% responded that Westside is fiscally responsible with taxpayer money. Support for a bond issue included: 86% due to outdated building conditions; 80% to improve math / science education for a 21st century economy; 78% for improved student safety; and 70% to ensure high-quality academic standards.

While the percentages for some of these important issues are high, there is still a need to inform all voters on why this bond issue is important to the District. Most people understand that the physical conditions of our buildings need improvement. There will also be a need to discuss “phasing” and identifying project priorities with a smaller (\$90 million) bond amount.

Dr. McCann reported that FM3 Research would be compiling all the survey data into a power point presentation that summarizes the polling results and can be easily shared with the community. FM3 Research also felt confident that the community is at a “good starting place” for a bond issue. A “Town Hall” meeting will be scheduled for the community to discuss grade configuration – Thursday, October 2nd – 6:00 p.m. – at WHS, Room #220.

Scott Hazelrigg stated that it would be important to establish an amount that the vast majority of the community supports and to let people know what the District will be doing with their money. We need to be held accountable. Peggy Rupprecht explained that this will involve factual communication in our discussions with people; “education” pieces (i.e. – what will the ballot look like); and, if the bond passes, keeping district residents informed and up to date on the work and progress of all projects.

Rob Zimmerman from Project Advocates explained that they are using the DLR data to create a rubric to help establish project priorities. Project Advocates has also identified different schools in our neighboring districts that the Task Force will be touring (schools built in the last 4 to 5 years), mostly in northwest Omaha, Elkhorn and Bennington. Bob Zagozda and Rick Avard will be putting together a tour schedule for mid September that will also include some of our Westside buildings.

Next Facilities Task Force Meeting:

Thursday, September 11, 2014
4:00 – 6:00 p.m. ~ ABC Building